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ABSTRACT

This study investigated whether presenting a unit of study on homosexuality, including positive interaction with a prominent homosexual, would reduce homonegative attitudes in college students. Male and female subjects (N=75) were volunteers from two sections of the upper-level psychology class Psychosexual Adjustment and control subjects (N=32) were sophomore, junior, and senior students registered for a psychology course who had not had a previous or concurrent course in human sexuality. Pretest and posttest administrators of the Kite and Deaux Homosexuality Attitude Scale were used to determine attitude change as a result of the educational unit. The students in the experimental group saw films of interviews concerning bisexuality and homosexuality, read the chapter in their book regarding homosexuality, and heard a lecture on homosexuality. Each student was given an informational pamphlet on homosexuality and Christianity. An ordained minister also visited the experimental group. The control group received no unit on homosexuality. They were presented with information regarding personality and adjustment psychology or some other general topic. Results indicated that students who received the presentation developed more positive attitudes toward homosexuality, as compared to the control group. Those students with gay friends had the most positive attitudes toward homosexuality of any of the groups of the entire sample. (ABL)

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Influencing Homonegative Attitudes in College Students Through an Educational Unit on Homosexuality

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Abstract

Influencing Homonegative Attitudes in College Students

Through an Educational Unit on Homosexuality

Darryl Eugene Curtis

Dr. Jeannette Heritage

This study investigated whether presenting a unit of study on homosexuality, including positive interaction with a prominent homosexual, would reduce homonegative attitudes in college students. Male and female subjects numbering 107 were volunteers from upper-level psychology classes at Middle Tennessee State University. Freshmen were not used in the analysis. Pretest and posttest administrations of the Kite and Deaux Homosexuality Attitude Scale were used to determine attitude change as a result of the educational unit. Results indicated that students who received the presentation developed more positive attitudes toward homosexuality, as compared to the control group. It was concluded that, in general, a college student's attitude toward homosexuality will change significantly to a more positive one by being involved in the presentation of a unit on homosexuality that includes films, pamphlets, a lecture, and a nonstereotypical gay speaker who attends the classroom for approximately 60 minutes of positive discussion.

Chapter 1

Introduction

This study was designed to investigate the potential for influencing change in attitudes toward homosexuals. The following is a review of findings concerning characteristics associated with positive and negative attitudes toward homosexuals and homosexuality.

Kurdek (1988) studied college students' attitudes toward homosexuals and found that one who is young, has low grades, and holds traditional attitudes toward men and women and their equality tends to use principled moral reasoning infrequently (Herek, 1984; Whitley, 1988). He concludes that positive attitudes toward homosexuality are related to principled moral reasoning. He argues that by focusing on the arbitrary nature of rules and regulations that govern human behavior, we may create positive attitudes toward homosexuals.

Results have indicated that attitudes toward homosexuals and specifically homonegative attitudes may be influenced through an educational process (Cerny & Pollyson, 1984; Chng, 1980; Serdahely & Ziembe, 1984). Chng states that the health educator has three responsibilities: instructor, source of referral and agent of change.

Common styles of unit coverage included role-playing, class room discussion, lectures, films, and interaction with homosexuals (Amir, 1976; Chng, 1980; Fiske & Taylor, 1984; Greenberg, 1975).

Chng suggests involving interaction with a wide variety of homosexuals to change the stereotypical view of homosexuals. Fiske and Taylor found that the homosexual in contact with heterosexuals should violate some stereotypes of homosexuals to foster attitude change--or several gay people should be present to show the diversity of the homosexual group. Greenberg (1975) stated that high school students who had completed a unit on homosexuality (including interactions with two professionals who were homosexual) believed that their attitudes toward different lifestyles became more open.

Amir (1969, 1976) stated that positive interactions with gay men and women may foster a change in attitude from less negative to more positive, but that the opposite may occur in unfavorable conditions. Casual situations or high frequency of contact does not necessarily create positive change. Institutional support may foster positive attitudes. Also when the member of the minority group is of a higher status than those in majority group, more positive change is likely to take place. One

disadvantage, however, is that contact between groups who hold objectionable standards to each other is considered an unfavorable condition.

Thus, it would seem that a unit of study on homosexuality, including positive interaction with a prominent homosexual, would reduce homonegative attitudes. The purpose of this study was to provide data that would aid in the development of such a program-- one that might be usable in colleges, high schools, and junior high schools alike.

Hypothesis 1: Subjects in the experimental condition would score higher on the posttest Homosexuality Attitude Questionnaire that those in the control group.

Hypothesis 2: Characteristics associated with less change will include higher frequency of church attendance less education and a peer group which includes no known homosexuals.

Chapter 2

Method

Subjects

Experimental subjects were volunteers from two sections of Psychosexual Adjustment, Psy 460/560, and control subjects were obtained from sophomore, junior, and senior students registered for a psychology course, who had not had a previous or concurrent course in human sexuality. There were 32 subjects in the control group and 75 subjects in the experimental group. Each experimental section was notified one week before testing as to the nature of the test (i.e., that it involved questions concerning attitudes toward various sexual subjects).

Materials

The instrument used was the Kite and Deaux Homosexuality Attitude Scale (Kite & Deaux, 1984). Added to this were various questions concerning basic characteristics such as gender and age, as well as information on religiosity and sexual behavior/orientation. Volunteers were also asked if they had had a previous course in psychosexual adjustment; those who had were not used in the analysis because they had already received the treatment.

Procedure

Volunteers were given the pretest version of the survey instrument, containing the added questions, along with a computer answer sheet. They were instructed to keep the answer sheet for the next two weeks, at which time they would complete the survey. All subjects would be surveyed during the same week of classes.

Over the course of the next two weeks, the students in the experimental groups saw films of interviews concerning bisexuality and homosexuality, read the chapter in their book regarding homosexuality, and heard a lecture on homosexuality. The text used to cover the unit was Human Sexuality (McCary & McCary, 1984). Each student was given an informational pamphlet on homosexuality and Christianity. The pamphlet was developed by the Metropolitan Community Church. An ordained minister from the Metropolitan Community Church visited each experimental group for one hour during the last week of the unit. Students were not required to attend this session, but all the subjects in the experimental group attended. The class period focused on discussion, mainly questions and answers, among the students and guest. The

posttest was administered immediately after the discussion and after the guest left the room.

The control group received no unit on homosexuality. They were presented with information regarding personality and adjustment psychology or some other general topic. They were presented with the posttest questionnaire during the same week as the experimental groups. Freshmen were not used in the analyses.

Chapter 3

Results

The SPSSX statistical program for multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to compare groups' mean ratings on the pretest and posttest scores to test Hypothesis 1, the independent variable being exposure to an educational unit on homosexuality and the dependent variable being the subjects' response scores on the Homosexuality Attitude Scale (HAS).

There was a main effect for the group throughout the study, $F(1,105) = 9.20$, $p = .003$, with the experimental group scoring significantly higher than the control group. Figure 1 indicates a significant interaction among the control and experimental groups from pretest to posttest on HAS scores, $F(1,105) = 7.48$, $p = .007$, the control group pretest mean being 55.22, while subjects in the experimental condition scored a pretest mean of 63.27. The experimental group scored significantly higher on the posttest than on the pretest, with a mean of 65.84. The control group mean decreased (nonsignificantly) across time, with a posttest mean of 53.84.

A linear regression analysis to test Hypothesis 2 showed no significance for the prediction of HAS score change from pretest to posttest as associated with: (a) level of education, (b) frequency of church attendance, and (c) a peer group which includes no known homosexuals, $F(2, 103) = .46$, $p = .71$.

A 2 x 3 multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) performed on the question "Do you have any gay friends?" revealed a main effect for response on scores on the HAS pretest, $F(2, 100) = 19.85$, $p < 001$. Posttest scores also differed significantly with a main effect for group, $F(1, 100) = 8.40$, $p = .005$, and a main effect for response, $F(2, 100) = 22.3$, $p < .001$. The experimental group scored significantly higher on the posttest, whether or not a homosexual was in the peer group. Also, those people who have gay friends scored significantly higher that those who do not have gay friends or those who do not know if they have gay friends. The group who has no gay friends scored lowest.

MANOVA performed on the question "Do you have any gay relatives?" revealed a main effect for group on the HAS pretest scores, $F(1, 101) = 5.63$, $p = .02$, and on the posttest, $F(1, 101) = 10.31$, $p = .002$.

The question, "Have you ever personally known anyone who professed to be a homosexual?" indicated a main effect for group on the pretest HAS scores, $F(1, 103) = 6.04$, $p = .016$, and for response, $F(1, 103) = 21.55$, $p < .001$. Those who have known someone who professed to be a homosexual scored significantly higher than those who had not. Posttest scores showed the same main effect for group, $F(1, 103) = 14.76$, $p < .001$, and for response, $F(1, 103) = 24.92$, $p < .001$.

Analysis of the question "Do you masturbate?" indicated a main effect for response on the pretest HAS scores, $F(1,102) = 10.12$, $p = .002$. Those who said they do masturbate scored significantly higher than those who said they do not. Of those who answered "yes", the control group scored a mean of 60.84, and the experimental group scored a mean of 71.48. Those in the control group who said they did not masturbate scored a mean of 52.28, while those in the experimental group who said they did not masturbate scored a mean of 58.08. Posttest scores indicated a main effect for group, $F(1, 102) = 13.69$, $p < .001$ and a main effect for response, $F(1, 102) = 9.37$, $p = .003$. Those who stated they masturbate scored significantly higher than those who said they do not.

MANOVA performed on the question "How often do you attend church?" revealed a main effect for group on the pretest HAS scores, $F(1, 103) = 6.63$, $p = .011$. There was also a main effect for response given, $F(1, 103) = 8.46$, $p = .004$. Those who said they attend church at least once a month scored significantly lower than those who attend church less than once a month. Posttest analysis indicated the same main effect for group, $F(1, 103) = 15.83$, $p < .001$, and for response, $F(1, 103) = 7.84$, $p = .006$. Also, those who consider themselves to be moderately to very religious scored significantly lower on the pretest than those who consider themselves to be somewhat religious to not religious at all, $F(1, 103) = 4.64$, $p = .033$. The significance of religiosity disappeared on the posttest.

Analysis of political affiliation indicated a main effect for group on the pretest HAS scores, $F(1, 101) = 5.21$, $p = .025$. Posttest scores also showed a main effect for group, $F(1, 101) = 14.04$, $p < .001$. There was a main effect for political affiliation on the posttest, $F(2, 101) = 3.37$, $p = .038$. There was a significant interaction on scores on the posttest when political affiliation was combined with group, $F(2, 101) = 5.40$, $p = .008$. Those subjects who stated they were Republicans scored about the same in both the control and experimental groups. Those in the experimental

group who stated they were Democrats or Other scored higher than those same people in the control group. The control group scored about the same regardless of political affiliation.

Chapter 4

Discussion

It was hypothesized that a unit presented on homosexuality, including a guest speaker who was gay, would reduce homonegative attitudes in college students. As predicted, the results from this study did reveal significant differences between those college students who received the treatment and those who did not. In general, learning more about homosexuality and talking with someone who is gay, but who does not fit the gay stereotype does help to change college students' attitudes to be less negative and/or more positive.

Characteristics of those receiving the treatment who scored highest on the posttest include having a peer group which includes a known homosexual. Those with gay friends have the most positive attitudes toward homosexuality of any of the groups in the entire sample. Just having known someone who professed to be gay, though not necessarily a friend, was also characteristic of a more positive attitude. Having a gay relative, however, did not seem to affect attitude change.

Students who reported themselves as being non-Republican also have more positive attitudes toward homosexuality. Those college students

who stated that they masturbate tended to have more positive attitudes toward homosexuality. Also, students who said they attend church less than once a month and consider themselves to be somewhat to not very religious had more positive attitudes.

In summary, it is theorized that in general college students' attitudes toward homosexuality will change significantly by being involved in the presentation of a unit on homosexuality which includes films, pamphlets, a lecture, and a non-stereotypical gay speaker who attends the classroom for approximately 60 minutes of discussion. Specific characteristics, however, about each subject's environment and experience may affect the amount of change, though there is no evidence for this assumption in the current study. It is recommended that more study be done in this area with longitudinal research, for example, posttests presented at 6 weeks and 12 weeks. Also, it may be beneficial to know exactly what aspect of the unit was responsible for the most attitude change. Study of the persuasiveness of having a guest speaker for classroom discussion alone may also be beneficial due to the finding that positive attitudes and positive attitude change is so highly associated with knowing a homosexual person. It is hoped that this and

future studies will add to the body of knowledge concerning the reduction of homonegative attitudes in the general public as well as in college students.

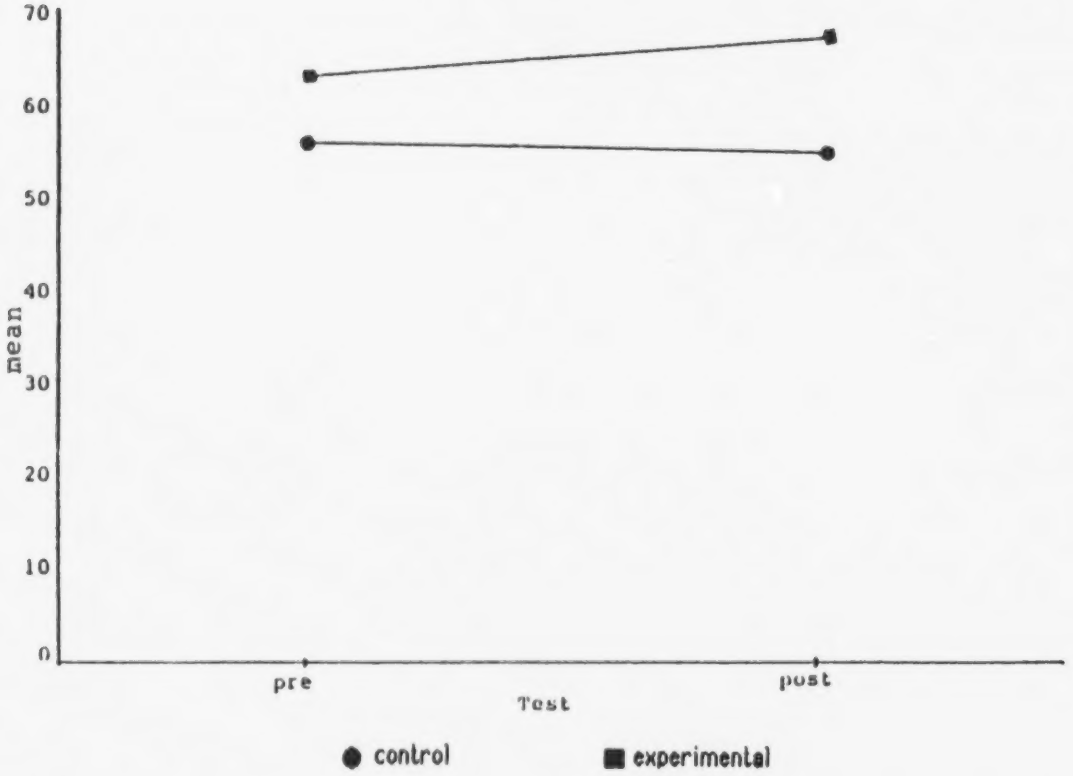

Figure 1. Interaction between control versus experimental group and pretest versus posttest.

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